

The Board of Trade fakes: there may not be all that many

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In this article I will discuss the latest position with regard to the classification of many perfins of this pattern as "fakes." A considerable amount of work has been done on this matter and is still proceeding. The situation is by no means clarified, but it is now time to air the problem and to appeal to anyone who can add to the work. For the sake of those who are not familiar with this pattern nor with the "fakes" recorded against it, I will outline the details of this perfin issue before moving on to the more difficult matter of the "fakes."

The Background

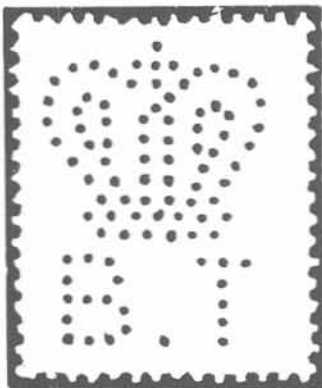
In Victorian times the officers of the various UK Government Departments had to purchase stamps for use in their Departments and claim the cost back

quarterly in arrears. Initially this was no great burden, as most letters from these Departments were post free, but as the need for postage stamps increased this became

a problem. It was alleviated in various ways. The GB Official Overprints are well known and the Official perfins are equally well known amongst perfin collectors. These were supplied free to the various Departments.

The Board of Trade (who dealt with all matters involving Trade not the responsibility of other Departments, and also with Shipping matters) chose to use perfined stamps. In fact this Department was the first to use perfined stamps for official purposes. Their perfined stamps were brought into use on 27th January 1881.

(Continued on page 27)



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The Board of Trade perfin is one of the best known British patterns

(Continued from page 21)

The Perfin

The perfin was a rather imposing one. A well designed crown over the initials of the Department, B. T., and it was well made. Ignoring, for the present, those designated "fake," there are two versions: one with large holes and an almost identical one with much smaller holes. This is the design illustrated in the perfin catalogues.

The large-hole version seems to have been used extensively throughout the whole usage period of the perfin. The exact design of the perfin machine is not known, but inspection of the small number of multiple pieces recorded suggests that it was a multi-headed machine and that the heads were almost identical. The exact number of heads is not known but it was less than half a sheet, as in later years of its use sheets were folded twice before perforation, giving rise to inverted, reversed and inverted-reversed examples. A block of 15 is known, as well as a vertical strip of four. These have identical strikes of equally spaces perfins suggesting that the machine was of at least 16 head (4x4) size. An interesting point was that one head was apparently inserted upside down in the plate giving rise to inverted strikes from the very start its use.

Over the years, as the machine was used extensively, the condition of the heads deteriorated and a large number of broken pins occurred and many (if not most) of the examples on later issues are found with blind holes. It is assumed that repairs were made from time to time and missing pins replaced. A recorded "variety" of the perfin with no "stop" between the "B" and "T" is no more than a missing pin. This perfin was withdrawn on 14th May 1904.

The small-hole type is probably a single head die. It first appeared about 1900 and all known examples are upright. A large number of examples of this type are found mint. It has been suggested that all examples of this type are fakes, but there are a number of examples which appear to be genuine. This die was withdrawn at the same time as the large hole type.

The "Fakes"

Captain H. T. Jackson made an extensive study of this perfin pattern and identified a large number of variant designs which he labeled as "fakes."^{2,3} He identified ten variant designs all of which he claimed were fakes. A large number of other variant designs have come to light since Capt. Jackson's publication and Edwards & Lucas¹ recorded fourteen fakes (with two more being identified in the addendum). Since then even more "fakes" have been identified. Most are illustrated in Edwards & Lucas.

The number of "fakes" soon exceeded the number of "genuine" examples. This caused some concern amongst collectors who started to ask not only who was manufacturing the fakes, but why they bothered as the stamps (although expensive by perfin standards) were never worth a considerable sum of money. The matter was investigated a number of times. The best round-up of the case against these variant designs being fakes is to be found in articles by John Nelson in the Bulletin of the UK Perfin Society.⁴ His conclusion was that there were no fakes and that all variants could have been caused either by variations between the various heads of the large-hole machine or by the existence of additional machines outside

London.

These fakes, if fakes they are, have a good provenance. The illustration in the Yvert & Tellier Catalogue is the Jackson Type 9 fake, and I have a Royal Philatelic Association Expert Committee Certificate for which also appears to be the Jackson Type 9 fake stating that it is genuine (but dated before Jackson published his paper).

Where does that leave collectors? It leaves us with a problem and with a task to hunt out the truth.

The Evidence

Just what evidence really exists to support either side of the argument?

In truth very little. Both Jackson and Nelson present viable arguments to support their cases, but in the main both arguments are based on supposition and conjecture. There is little hard fact to support either argument.

Just what do we know? There are a lot of variants of the basic design of this pattern, and some are of very poor workmanship. This leads to the suspicion that at least some are fakes. However, the effort involved in producing these "fakes" seems very great for little reward as examples of genuine perfins are not greatly expensive. The Certificated example mentioned above is on a mint SG 188 (Scott 99), which must have been worth far more unperfinned. We need to look at the hard evidence provided by the perfined stamps themselves.

Jackson made much of the appearance of some variants on "impossible" stamps, so we should look at this first. The perfin was introduced early in 1881 so it should not appear on stamps which were discontinued before this date. However it does. This pattern is known on SG 43 (Scott 33) and SG 49 (Scott 29). It is

(Continued on page 28)

Your input can help us understand the Board of Trade pattern

(Continued from page 27)

possible that these were stamps which were in stock at the time the perfins were introduced and perfinned long after they were purchased. I know of an example of this perfin on SG 43 (Scott 33) on a cover dated 26th April 1871, and another piece with two strips of SG 43 (Scott 33) dated December 1872. With the dates some 10 years before the official start of the official use, it is hard to believe that these are not examples which have been removed from the paper, faked, and stuck back in place. All these early examples are of variants of the known genuine large-hole type. It is possible, of course, that these were all trials using early machines and that once the decision was taken to use perfinned stamps a multi-head machine was purchased and a stock of current stamps perfinned ready for use on 27th January 1881, together with stocks of old stamps already perfinned during the trial period.

Evidence can also be sought at the end of the period of use. All official stamps were withdrawn on 14th May 1904, and it is unlikely that many, if any, were perfinned after this date. A number of examples are in fact known on stamps which would not have been available on that date—notably on the later issues of King Edward VII which were not issued until long after the perfinning had been discontinued. It is difficult to see how these later issues could have been genuinely perfinned (and even less used postally), but it is easy to suggest that the fakers were not able to distinguish between the various printings of the King Edward VII issues and thus perfinned later issues in error. I have, in my collection, an example of SG 219 (Scott 218) with a type 15 "fake" clearly dated 1909 which is difficult to explain.

The postmarks on perfinned examples also show an interesting pattern of usage. Those stamps perfinned with the known genuine large hole type are almost invariably postmarked in London, while those of the variant types are often postmarked outside London. The numbers of examples in my collection with postmarks in London and in the provinces are statistically in the same proportion of those postmarked simi-

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larly in my non-perfin collection for the same period. This does not prove the variants are fakes—just that the large hole type was used in London and the others used generally across the country. Supporters of the "fake" theory will say that the fakers produced their fakes using any stamps available (hence the wide variation in postmarks) while those opposing the idea of fakes will say the non-large-hole variants were used in offices across the country or by travelling officers of the Board. Some work is still on going in the United Kingdom to try to list the postmarks on particular types of the "fakes" in an attempt to identify specific variants with a specific town, but no substantive evidence has appeared to link any particular variation with a town. Much weight has been placed on the existence of a "fake" pattern postmarked "Dublin". However, this city was in the United Kingdom in Victorian times and used GB

stamps just as any other UK city.

To finish we need to look at the variant patterns themselves, and to compare them with the known genuine pattern. The workmanship of the genuine pattern is very good, but so is the workmanship on many of the "fakes." Some variant patterns are just as well produced as the genuine ones. Nevertheless, there are some variant patterns which are very poorly produced, being rough and misshapen or simple pin perfs. It is hard to believe that the Board who commissioned such a fine perfin in the large-hole type would have also allowed the use of these very poor examples, but it is equally difficult to see why fakers should take so much trouble to make such good fakes of stamps which were not valuable. The latter is even more surprising as I have in my collection "fakes" which would be much more valuable as unperfined stamps.

Conclusions

So what is the answer? We just do not know. The large-hole type and (probably) the small hole type are genuine, and a number of the very poor standard variants are fakes, but the jury must still be out on the large proportion of those once labelled fake. If any readers have any evidence or comments for or against any of the ideas expressed here (or any further comments and ideas) I would be delighted to hear from them.

References

¹ *GB Official Perfins*, by T. A. Edwards & B. Lucas, pub. by Perfin Society 1984

² *Stamp Collecting*, 7th & 14th Dec 1962

³ *The Cinderella Philatelist*, April 1981, 21, (3)

⁴ *The Perfin Bulletin*, No 291 (Dec 97) & No 294 (Jun 98)